

I just got back from spending a couple weeks with my parents in scenic downtown Ballwin where we were pretty busy watching Food TV. There were a lot of shows about how to make the most of fresh summer fruits and vegetables, as well as, many episode devoted to quick and easy meals so one could have the free time to make the most out of summer. I learned a lot about grilling, preserving and making desserts which came in handy; I had to bake a lot because I was also blessed to be able to spend time with family and friends and meet a couple of new cousins who ranged in age from a few weeks to a few months old. More than once I heard the expression, "You're so cute I could eat you right up." Which is an extremely odd and creepy phrase. Not one of the cooking shows discussed cuteness as necessary for any ingredients and, of course, not one show dealt with how to cook a baby, or any form of cannibalism.

When we talk about cannibalism we usually don't actually mean eating the flesh of another person, it is a pejorative. The femme fatale is called a man-eater. Businesses do a lot of research before expanding to prevent cannibalism of their revenue sources. And at the time the Gospel of John was written, cannibalism was a metaphorical tool used to describe factionalism that disrupted society. Greek and Roman writers used it to describe dissidents outside the civilized order of things, and the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus used it in opus the *Jewish Wars* which he wrote in 75 ad. The Jewish audience Jesus addressed in today's gospel would have understood it in this way.

Granted that there was friction between Jesus and the religious establishment and the followers of Christ saw a rift forming, but for them the general idea was that cannibalism described radical outsiders and this would be confusing. Were they being asked to partake in something radical? To become outcasts? And Jesus' response to their confusion is even more perplexing: He literally is telling them to chew His flesh and drink His blood. There is now doubt that it His body has to be consumed.

Our Lord and Savior offers Himself to us and we need what He offers, definitively, leaving no room for any doubt about the message our Savior tells us we have to consume his flesh AND that there is an incredible benefit to this feast:

- "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."
- "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."
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His Body and Blood are a real, concrete pledge of eternal life and a guarantee of our resurrection. Thomas Aquinas explains the Eucharistic Mystery in this way, "The Word gives life to our souls, but the Word made flesh nourishes our bodies. In this sacrament is contained the Word not only in His divinity but also in His humanity; therefore, it is the case not only of the glorification of our souls but also our bodies."

Sadly, most of people in the crowd and the many of Christ's followers found Jesus' words today too difficult to accept and turned away from Him. They were foolish and didn't understand the feast prepared for them and WHY it was being offered.

Jesus revealed to his disciples the nature of the Kingdom and gave them a share in his mission, joy, and sufferings. Jesus spoke of a still more intimate communion: "Abide in me, and I in you... I am the vine, you are the branches" (Jn 15.4-5). This includes also a communion in Christ's own body: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him"

"All Christ's invitations, promises and even threats spring from His great desire of giving Himself to us in the Eucharist. He is so adamant about having us receive him in this sacrament because love always sighs for, and tends to a union with, the object beloved. True friends wish to be united in such a manner as to become one. God's love for us is so immense, He destined us to possess Him not only in Heaven, but also here below, by the more intimate union, under the appearances of bread and wine. (St. Alphonsus Ligouri, The Love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Ch2).

The biggest obstacle to this union is our own foolishness, the foolishness spoken of in our first two readings. We see in the Proverbs that Wisdom has prepared for us a banquet and if we forsake foolishness we will live and grow in understanding, and Christ personifies this wisdom.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul is talking about the new life we are given in Baptism, and perfected through Confirmation. A radical, new life which enables the Christian to understand God's will, and to lead a life centered on God and the Kingdom to come. And as all good parents know, just giving life to a child is not enough. It must be nurtured. So it is fitting that the new life offered to us through Jesus must also be supplied with perfect food also through Jesus, a food that draws us deeper into the mystery of God's love for us and manifests itself in prayer and thanksgiving, and the ultimate thanksgiving is the Eucharist.

Jesus Christ and the Church desire all the faithful to partake daily in the sacred banquet, a desire for the unity with God by which we draw strength to restrain from lust, to wash away the slight faults of daily occurrence and to take precautions against the more serious sins to which human frailty is liable (Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*).

In a few minutes we will receive our Savior in the most precious sacrament of the altar and enter into a profoundly intimate union with Him. It is true we do not see Him; but He beholds us, and is really present; yes, He is present in order that we may possess Him and He conceals Himself, that we may desire Him, and until we reach our true homeland Jesus Christ wishes in this way to be entirely ours, and to

be perfectly united to us. (Lumen Gentium)

We can do nothing more agreeable to Jesus Christ than to go to Communion with the dispositions suitable to so great an action, since we are then united to Him according to the desire of our all-loving God (St. Alphonsus Ligouri, The Love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Ch2).

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